

Date?

Late 1920's?

The History of Old Pewter Drinking Vessels

By RICHARD NEATE



TANKARD OF ABOUT 1650

A rare specimen with very flat lid, unusual type of thumbpiece, and almost entire absence of skirt at base of drum.

Harrison formed a very important branch of the pewterer's craft at that time.

Pewter tankards of the reign of Elizabeth are extremely rare. The majority of those that have survived the ravages of time and have come down to us in a more or less perfect state of preservation, are richly ornamented with fine chasing and repoussé work both on the drum and the lid. During the first half of the seventeenth century the tendency seems to have been to increase the height of the tankard and consequently its capacity, probably to meet the requirements of the Cavaliers in quenching their prodigious thirsts.

Occasionally, however, one meets with a tankard of the Charles I. period which at first sight seems to contradict this statement. This tankard is decidedly squat in form and does not usually hold more than about half a pint. It is of quite plain workmanship except for the inside of the lid, which in the centre has a medallion of the unhappy monarch in full armour. One is led to the conjecture that these tankards were made small so as to be easily carried about in the Cavalier's kit. When they lifted the lid to drink a toast the likeness of the king was always before them.

* * *

With the coming of Cromwell and his Puritans, when hard drinking was no longer the order of the day, we find the tankard reduced in size, and ornamentation almost entirely absent. They seem to reflect the austere age to which they belong. The lids of these tankards are flattish; the drum at the base has only a suspicion of a skirt and the handle is made of solid pewter. It is to the reign of Charles II. that we are indebted for the most perfectly proportioned and harmoniously balanced tankard that has yet been produced by the pewterer. There is a particular distinction and quaintness about it which is entirely absent in the tankards of the eighteenth century. (Continued on page 14)

DRINKING vessels may be divided into two main classes: those with handles and those without. The former class may be divided again into two—drinking vessels with handles and lids, or with handles only. Those with one handle, whether lidded or not, are tankards; those without handles are known as goblets, beakers, or ale cups. Loving cups, posset and caudle cups have more than one handle and are usually unlidded.

In 1423 a regulation was made that retailers of ale should sell the same in their houses in "pots of peutre" sealed and open; and that whoever carried ale to the buyer should hold the pot in one hand and the cup in the other; and that all who had pots unsealed should be fined.

* * *

Evidently the "pot of peutre" served as a flagon, and each guest was supplied with a cup, probably of horn or leather. Harrison in his "Description of England" wrote: "As for drinke, it is usuallie filled in pots, gobblots, jugs, bols of silver in noblemen's houses, also in fine Venice glasses of all forms, and for the most part of these elsewhere, in pots of earth of sundrie shapes and moulds, whereof manie are garnished with silver, or a leastwise in pewter." The making of lids for the "pots of earth" described by



TANKARDS OF ABOUT 1670 AND 1680

The 1680 example on the right has a wriggle-work decoration of tulips.

OLD PEWTER DRINKING VESSELS *(Continued from page 13)*

These tankards were made in an endless variety of sizes, some holding more or less than a quart, pint, half-pint, or gill. That they were used solely for drinking and not as measures is evident from the fact that one rarely finds any two of exactly the same dimensions or capacity, and none of them conform to the standard measure in force at the time.

Thumbpieces were made in various forms according to the inspiration of the pewterer. The one most frequently met with is the "Corkscrew" or "ram's horns" thumbpiece, which in some cases has a small V-shaped piece in front forming a lid attachment. Another favourite one is formed of two doves, beak to beak. The lids still retained the flatness of their predecessors: "The flatter the lid the earlier the tankard" may be accepted as a good guiding axiom.

Numerous tankards of this period were engraved, both on the drum and lid, with flowering designs of tulips, roses, etc., executed in a kind of wriggle work. Line engraving was usually employed in the case of arms or crests.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century the lid of the tankard was made slightly higher and the top, instead of being left quite flat as heretofore, assumed a rather convex form, a step being cut round the top of the booge. The handles became larger and more elaborate, and in order to relieve the drum of the extra weight of metal the handle was cast hollow by a process known as "throwing out."

The molten pewter after being poured into the gun-metal mould was given only sufficient time to allow that part next to the mould to solidify; the mould was then quickly reversed and the hot centre thrown out. This produced a perfect hollow casting



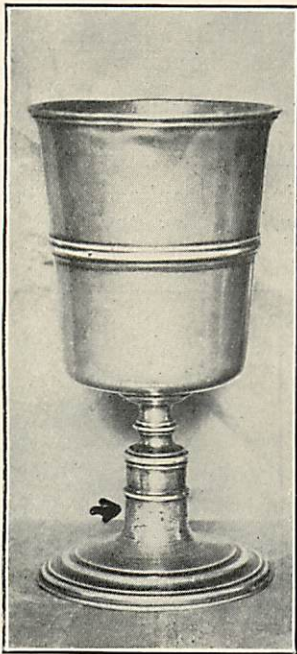
TANKARD OF ABOUT 1730
Showing the domed type of lid.

without the use of sand cores. This method is still used to-day. In order to give greater strength to that part where drum and handle joined a V-shaped piece was added to the latter and extended down the drum for about $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

English pewter peg tankards of the seventeenth century are very seldom met with. They had obvious disadvantages and never attained to general use. Little pegs of pewter were soldered inside the drum at perpendicular distances from top to bottom to mark off different measures, the idea being to prevent a member of the party drinking more than his share; the first person was to drink only to the first peg, the second to the second peg, and so on.

Before long, wagers were being laid as to how many pegs could be consumed at one pull at the tankard. Probably the expression to "Take one

(Continued on page 18.)



COMMUNION CUP—CHARLES II



SECULAR DRINKING CUP—circa 1660



COMMUNION CUP—circa 1760

OLD PEWTER DRINKING VESSELS

(continued from page 14)

down a peg or two " had its inception at one of these matches. Longfellow refers to the peg tankard in his " Golden Legend " :—

" Come old fellow, drink down to your peg!
But do not drink any further, I beg!"

In the early years of the eighteenth century the tankard underwent a decided change for the worse by the addition of a dome with repeated mouldings, to the hitherto flat lid. In its transitional stages the Stuart drum was retained, but a little later this too had one and sometimes two bands or fillets added, which encompassed it either just below the V-piece of the handle or immediately above that part where it joined the body at its base. This had the effect of shortening the drum.

About 1710 the tankard suffered what was perhaps its greatest loss by the disappearance of the little frontal extension to the rim of the lid, and the clumsy " back scroll " thumbpiece was substituted for the delicately moulded one of the seventeenth century.

Another form of drinking vessel was the beaker, which was probably derived originally from the earlier cups of horn, leather or wood, and used contemporaneously with them. The addition of a skirt base gave it greater solidity and the outward curve of the lip made it convenient to drink from. The body was very much narrower than that of the tankard and this enabled it to be grasped easily without a handle. They were made in a great variety of sizes. Beakers were often used in Protestant churches as Communion cups, and many of them are engraved with religious subjects.

The beaker survived for a very long period in the inns and taverns up and down the countryside, and although those of the reign of George IV. and William IV. and Victoria are only about half the height of the seventeenth and eighteenth century's kind, there is little or no difference between them and the older type. The goblet, a bell-shaped cup standing upon a low foot or base, was also used in large numbers in the taverns.